

## Turkish Public Diplomacy in The Balkans: The Power of Soft Power

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### Abstract

The perception and understanding of diplomacy in the bipolar world order, the limitations and frame of the cold war world. After the cold war, this bipolar order has left its place multipolar structure. In this order the strength of the idealism, cultural relations, diplomacy and interaction began to increase while military, hard and realistic approaches in the relations of countries with each other reduced. This situation also laid the foundation for the emergence of two important concepts such as public diplomacy and soft power in the discipline of international relations. These two concepts, which have been discussed intensely in Turkish public diplomacy in recent years, constitute the theme of working. In this framework it will be discussed through the example of the Balkans that how effectively Turkey uses public diplomacy and the power of soft power.

**Key Words:** Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Strategic Depth, Turkey, Balkan State.

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## Introduction

By the driving force of the globalisation, the states started to develop a foreign policy focusing on cultural and educational activates rather than militarism and economic dimension. In this power relationship that is called as the soft power, the severity is not used and the components enabling the consent to be given are articulated, the public diplomacy is also accepted as the tool for penetration. One of the nations that is not also unconcerned to the international relations to be performed through the public diplomacy evolving towards the dominance of the soft power is the Republic of Turkey. Turkey where great changes were seen after the collapse of the Soviets in 1990s, want to use the cultural superiority that is an important source for the soft power, as a result of its thousands of years history and empire background on the lands where its predecessor ruled and has the sense of belonging, completely. The very first aim of this work is to find an answer to the matter how Turkey reinforce its soft power in Balkans through the official institutions within the context of the public diplomacy by focusing on cultural and educational activities after the rule of Justice and Development Party (JDP). In order to answer this question, firstly the soft power and public diplomacy concepts will be considered and then the activities of the official establishments bringing the potential of Turkey into the forefront with soft power components will be analysed.

## 1. Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

The change in the power fact that is determinant for the relations among the states is resulted from reasons like the fractions to be experienced in the power balances, increasing cultural relationships and impulsion for the avoidance from the war. The most important concept explaining this change is the soft power that is dialectically located against the hard power and added to the international relations jargon by Joseph S. Nye. The soft power is the acquirement of the desired thing through the existing attraction or charm rather than force or money according to Nye (208:94). The very basic goal of the soft power is to penetrate into the countries through being agenda and highlighting the charming items before the people of the countries with reference to mutual independency relations in the field of even socio-politics in addition to the collaboration and interaction in the international relations. Even this process is more difficult than hard power methods, it contains having consent through network effects strategy (Lee, 2009:216) focusing on the propagation of the behaviour codes, common references and certain standards. Therefore, the soft power is accepted as a costly and tough process as a method facilitating to shape the opinions of the counter party and to sustain this effect. The soft power is to employ some

resources while harmonising the interests of a state with the national interests of the other states and controlling those states. According to Nye (2008:94) the soft power is fed by four main sources which are institutions, history-culture, political values and politics. Geun Lee (2009: 209-211) developed Nye's concept and divided the soft power into five categories to achieve its goals together with division into five main sources. "They are: (1) Soft power to improve external security environment by projecting peaceful and attractive images of a country; (2) Soft power to mobilize other countries' supports for one's foreign and security policies (3) Soft power to manipulate other countries' way of thinking and preferences (4) soft power to maintain unity of a community or community of countries (5) soft power to increase approval ratings of a leader or domestic support of a government." Lee adds that "Above 5 categories of soft power share one very peculiar common denominator with regard to power resources. All five categories use what is called "soft resources" or symbolic resources to exert influence upon others. Hard resource such as military weapons or financial resources are not the sources of soft power but soft resources such as ideas, images, theories, know-hows, education, discourses, culture, traditions, national or global symbols, etc. are the sources of soft power". Although Nye and Lee have focused on all the components other than military and economic power, the culture is at the centre of their ideas. The applicability of the soft power of a country is equal to the level of recognition of the popular culture of this same country. The most important instrument to be used to propagate the culture as the soft power potential is the public diplomacy.

The public diplomacy has many definitions and in general it can be defined as "a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies"(Tuch,1990:3). On that point the public diplomacy is the creating, informing and affecting the citizens of another state by a state in order to direct in compliance with its own interests. The public diplomacy, in which the political communication plays a major role, is positioned into two main frames which are from the state to public and from the people to state. The state policies and activities on the state to people axis are performed through official agencies, tools and channels. On the other hand, the communication activities from the people to the people are developed through the establishments in the field of the civil society such as NGOs, think tanks, press, universities, exchange programs, associations and foundations. In this context, the public diplomacy becomes different than classic diplomacy taking diplomats as the sole principle actors, with its multi-dimensional and multi-party communication channels (Kalin,t.y). The public diplomacy aims to visibly persuade the people of certain countries which are defined as the domain and to be expressed the self by consolidating the state power to achieve its interests. The success of this process is determined by the soft power potential of the country. This potential is based on culture, historical unity and geography which are the absolute resources of the public diplomacy. By using the public

diplomacy that is the field of exercise of the soft power, it is easier to charm and manage the perceptions of various nations having similar cultural codes and living in the same geography with varying ethnicities. However, it should be noted that for the success of the public diplomacy, it is necessary for the country where the soft power is applied needs to accept the value and legitimacy of the government policies of the state applying the soft power with reference to the diplomatic ties to be formed.

The policy focusing on the soft power rather than the military and economic basis in international relations after the Cold War affected Turkey greatly like the rest of the world. Turkey that had followed the balance politics among greater powers until 1990s and included in the Western block found new areas to develop its foreign politics after the collapse of the Soviets. Balkans was the first one of these areas. There are very strong historical and cultural ties between Turkey and Balkans where was inside the Ottoman hinterland for almost five hundred years and Turks resided even before the Ottomans. The relationships between Balkan nations and Turks had a new dimension following the independence of those nations. Turkey who had assisted the Balkan nations to build their institutional capacities following their independences had then accepted a four-axis policy consisting of high level political dialogue, security, economic integration and the protection of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society structure. Those policies serve for the protection of the existence of Turks, economic interests and political interests in the Balkans (Karagül,2013:88,92). Turkey has been trying to achieve those objectives through its official agencies. These institutions not only enable the collaboration for the stabilisation of the Balkans states but also make the soft power of Turkey to be felt in the region.

## **2. Institutions Reinforcing the Soft Power of Turkey**

The agencies which execute the diplomatic activities of the states are important sources of the soft power. The most important components of the public diplomacy towards the Balkans by Turkey after the recognition of such power in hands in 2000s are Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), Yunus Emre Institute (YEE), Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMV). Apart from those, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (DİB), Red Crescent (Kızılay) and TRT are the tools to put the diplomatic mission in the region.

TIKA operating in many fields from education to agriculture, finance to industry was formed in 1992 the procreation of social structure, maintaining sustainable identity politics, development of socio-cultural rights and reinforcing the technical infrastructure of Turkic republics following the declaration of their independence in Central Asia ([www.tika.gov.tr](http://www.tika.gov.tr)). Although

it was formed for the development works of the Central Asia Turkic Republics after the independence, along with the changes in the foreign policy during the rule of JDP, its field of activity we expanded towards the Balkans. TİKA opened coordination offices in eight countries which are Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Romania and Serbia in the Balkans ([www.tika.gov.tr](http://www.tika.gov.tr)). TİKA, maintaining its activities through these offices became the source for great achievements in Balkans. These activities with reference to 2017 data, contain the education projects, historical piece restorations, Ottoman archaeological works, efforts to increase the living standards of rural people, employment and social infrastructure improvements, formation of health facilities and development of organisational infrastructure ([www.tika.gov.tr](http://www.tika.gov.tr)). The policies of TİKA towards the Balkan countries are not limited with the socio-economic improvements, development of the organisation structures and tracing the sings of the Ottoman-Turk heritage. This agency organises many seminars, exhibitions and conferences on the matters which are at the agenda of Turkey with their possible solutions to inform the Balkans people ([www.tika.gov.tr](http://www.tika.gov.tr)). TİKA has been achieved tens of project to sustain the name of the Republic of Turkey until today in the Balkans that takes place in the heart of the JDP's public diplomacy policies.

The most important component of Turkey's soft power potential in the region is the culture. After the Ottoman conquests, the people in this region accepted Turkish culture as the higher identity. First of the cultural elements strengthening the relationship between Turks and Balkan nations is Turkish language. Beyond using Turkish to keep the relations with the rulers of Balkan nations, they accepted Turkish as the superior language. Existence of Turkish language in this region for centuries together with their respective languages has an important role on the determination of the policies of Turkey towards the region. In this context, Yunus Emre Institute was formed in 2007 to introduce the cultural heritage of Turkey, Turkish language, culture and art; to develop the friendship of Turkey with other countries; to increase cultural exchange; present related domestic documents and others in abroad to the use of world; to serve to the candidates aiming to be educated in the fields of Turkish language, culture and art. This organisation undertaking the presidency of the Global Public Diplomacy Union Network is active in eight countries with fourteen cultural centres of which three in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, two in Romania and Albania, one in Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia ([www.yee.org.tr](http://www.yee.org.tr)). When the activities of YEE are assessed in general in 2017, it is able to mention that Turkish language courses in Balkan countries, protection of Turkish manuscripts, exhibitions and photograph contests on Turkish culture, theatres and movies on Turkish culture, concerts presenting the rhythm of Turkish music, Turkish Sufi music and ritual, Turkish handcraft courses, fashion shows introducing Seljuk-Ottoman dresses, scientific meetings and panels, conferences and conversations on important matters in the agenda of Turkey ([www.yee.gov.tr](http://www.yee.gov.tr)). YEE performing the cultural diplomacy that is an important part of

the public diplomacy reinforces the soft power of Turkey in Balkans through cultural and artistic activities.

The Balkans where Turks and relative communities live, is greatly charming for Turkey due to this relationships. In order to re-establish the relationships with the cognates and related communities living in this geography, to achieve policies which will increase their level of development in terms of social-economics and socio-culture, to provide the educational opportunities for youngsters in the Balkans, the YTB was founded in 2010. YTP is active on four main areas which are the citizens in abroad, related communities, international students and civil society organisations. YTB that realizes its projects by the help of the collaboration with TIKA and YEE in the Balkans primarily focuses on the education for foreign students in Turkey. By the help of the program to called as Turkey Scholarships, people from Turkish cognate and sister communities are enrolled to Turkish universities. Besides, when the activities in the Balkans are assessed in general, YTB has achieved many works such as educational programs in Turkish language and culture, exhibitions, internship programs in public offices, student camps and meetings with Turkey graduates, library days and so on. YTB cooperates with the think-tanks and civil society organizations of Balkan states on the re-establishment of the relationships between the region and Turkey ([www.ytb.gov.tr](http://www.ytb.gov.tr)). Under the light of all these works, YTB especially makes the soft power of Turkey in the region through educational activities.

The education is the most important component that comes after the cultural activities grounding the soft power of Turkey in the region. While Turkey is consolidating its strength in the region through the education, YEE and YTP are not the only to work for. The TMV also supports this process despite its fresh formation. This public foundation focusing on the international education in order to reach the good for all civilizations was established in 2016. TMV with his mission of “performing comprehensive educational activities on the basis of rooted wisdom tradition of Anatolia and the common heritage of humanity in whole world” opens educational organisations, establishes libraries, sports complexes and laboratories, prepares tools for the education provides scholarships and shelters in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo where it is active in the Balkans ([www.turkiyemaarif.org](http://www.turkiyemaarif.org)).

These institutions are not the all the tools of the public diplomacy demonstrating the soft power of Turkey. Other organisations which Turkey uses to transfer her experiences are DIB, Kızılay and TRT. One of the items facilitating the soft power to be gained is the religion. As a result of rule of Turks in the Balkans for decades, many communities became Muslim. In addition to its secular identity after the proclamation of the Republic, Turkey is an Islamic country and these characteristics make her to be perceived as the role model in the region, so Turkey increased its soft power. In that sense, the public diplomacy between the Balkans and Turkey is maintained by DIB. It is the only



organisation that continuously sustained its relations with the Balkans by the assignment of muftis and imams to the region since the very first years of the Republic. Together with the change in the diplomatic understanding of Turkey, DİB started to play more efficient role. DİB launched Holy Quran courses in the Balkans through its own organisation and Turkish Religion Foundation (TDV), distributed Holy Quran transcripts in the respective languages of the Balkan nations, organised activities on religious days and fests, contributed to the education of international students, distributed offering meats, built mosques and organised symposiums on religious matters ([www.diyaset.gov.tr](http://www.diyaset.gov.tr), [www.tdv.org.tr](http://www.tdv.org.tr)). Another important agency carrying out the public diplomacy in the Balkans is Kızılay. As in the period of Ottomans, Turkish Kızılay is active in the Balkans and provides offering, clothes, food and other social aids ([www.kizilay.org.tr](http://www.kizilay.org.tr)). The other organisation making the soft power of Turkey visible and developing the public diplomacy is TRT. TRT produces historical, religious and political programs for Turkey and Balkans on TRT Avaz broadcasting within the body of TRT to contribute to the reinforcement of the relationships between Turkey and the Balkans and the collective conscious in the region. When it is assessed in general, DİB and TDV, Kızılay, TRT which are the important organisations for the public diplomacy help Turkey to increase its soft power in the Balkans each day.

## Conclusion

The major powers believe in that the relations should be shaped according to the smart power in recent years; however, in the foundations of new power politics, transition from hard power components to the soft power components is there in any case. The JDP who is aware of that situation, discovered the strength of the soft power in compliance with the zeitgeist, used the historical and cultural great ties with the Balkans following the Ottoman rule to reinforce the domain of Turkey through the public diplomacy. Following the stabilisation in the Balkans, Turkey has aided to the Balkan countries to develop their institutional infrastructure together with the realisation of socio-cultural and social-economic relationships through its agencies such as TİKA, YEE, YTB, TMV, DİB, TDV, Kızılay and TRT. As Turkish culture maintains its existence in the region as the popular culture, the foreign policy perception of ruling JDP on the basis of cultural interaction and network effect facilitates Turkey to consolidate its soft power. Therefore, Turkey grounding on the public diplomacy providing the efficient use of the soft power plays an order-forming role that charms the peoples and countries of the Balkans.

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